

GLIMPSES OF NEWMAN

1801–1890

selected by
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Mary Fourdrinier, 1801

I trust your sweet little boy is as well as I sincerely wish him, and that you mend in the nursing way. Pray do not injure your constitution by giving nourishment too long to that love of a tiger.¹

Duke of Kent, 1813?

At the end of his schooling at the Academy for Young Gentlemen at Ealing, where he had been an apt pupil—‘No boy had run through the school, from the bottom to the top as rapidly as John Newman’, according to his headmaster, Rev. Dr George Nicholas—Newman was selected to give a speech before the Duke of Kent. Unfortunately his voice had just begun to break and though he persevered with his speech, it sounded more like yodelling than speaking. His embarrassed headmaster explained apologetically,

‘His voice is breaking.’

‘Ah’, replied the Duke, ‘but his *action* was good’.²

Edward Copleston, 1822

Every election to a fellowship which tends to discourage the narrow and almost the technical routine of public examinations, I consider as an important triumph. You remember Newman himself was an example. He was not even a good classical scholar, yet in mind and powers of

¹ A letter to Newman’s mother from her sister-in-law, quoted in Joyce Sugg, *Ever Yours Affly: John Henry Newman and His Female Circle* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), 7.

² J. Lewis May, *Cardinal Newman: A Study* (London: Centenary, 1945), 10.

composition, and in taste and knowledge, he was decidedly superior to some competitors, who were a class above him in the Schools.³

Richard Hurrell Froude, 1828

... Newman is a fellow that I like more the more I think of him: only I would give a few odd pence if he were not a heretic⁴

John Campbell Shirp, c.1834–1842

His power showed itself chiefly in the new and unlooked-for way in which he touched into life old truths, moral or spiritual, which all Christians acknowledge, but most have ceased to feel After hearing these sermons you might come away still not believing the truths peculiar to the High Church system, but you would be harder than most men if you did not feel more than ever ashamed of coarseness, selfishness, worldliness; if you did not feel the things of faith brought closer to the soul

In Oriel Lane light-hearted undergraduates would drop their voices and whisper, 'There's Newman', as, with head thrust forward and gaze fixed as though at some vision seen only by himself, with swift, noiseless steps he glided by.

From the seclusion of study and abstinence and prayer, from habitually dwelling in the Unseen, he seemed to come forth that one day of the week [Sunday] to speak to others of the things he had seen and known.

... how vividly comes back the remembrance of the aching blank, the awful pause which fell on Oxford, when that voice had ceased and we knew we would hear it no more. It was as when to one kneeling by night in the silence of some vast cathedral, the great bell tolling solemnly overhead has suddenly gone still. Since then, many voices of powerful teachers may have been heard, but none that ever penetrated the soul like his.⁵

³ *Autobiographical Writings: John Henry Newman*, edited by Henry Tristram (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 64, 68. In a letter written in 1843 the former Provost of Oriel—by then Bishop of Llandaff and Dean of St Paul's—recalled the election of Newman, adding ominously: 'Alas, how little did we anticipate the fatal consequences!'

⁴ Richard Froude suspected that Newman was too liberal: this remark comes in a letter of 1828 quoted by Desmond Morse-Boycott, *Lead Kindly Light: Studies of Saints and Heroes of the Oxford Movement* (New York: Macmillan, 1933). His brother's description of Newman is given below for 1837.

⁵ The writer, later Principal of St Andrews, heard Newman, then Vicar of St Mary's, preaching; his reminiscences are recorded partly in *Project Canterbury: John Henry Newman* (London: Catholic Literary Association, 1933), and partly in Lewis May, *Cardinal Newman*, 30.



Newman c.1845, by W. C. Ross

James Anthony Froude, 1837

His head was large, his face remarkably like that of Julius Caesar. He seemed always to be better informed on common topics of conversation than anyone else who was present He was lightness itself—the lightness of elastic strength.⁶

Matthew Arnold, 1843?

... he was in the very prime of life; he was close at hand to us at Oxford; he was preaching in St Mary's pulpit every Sunday; he seemed about to transform and renew what was for us the most national and natural institution in the world, the Church of England. Who could resist the charm of that spiritual apparition gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St Mary's, rising into the pulpit, and then, in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music—subtle, sweet, mournful?⁷

⁶ Sheridan Gilley, *Newman and His Age* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 176. James was the younger brother of Richard (see the entry for 1828).

⁷ In the third lecture of his American tour, 1883–1884, Arnold recalls his memory of Newman from forty years earlier (*Discourses in America* [London: Macmillan, 1885]). Another glimpse of Newman through Arnold's eyes is given below for 1880.

John Keble, 1844–1845

You know, my dear Newman, you are a very sensitive person ... a certain restlessness, a longing after something more, something analogous to a very exquisite ear in music, which should keep you, I should think, in spite of yourself, intellectually and morally dissatisfied wherever you were ... wherever I go, there is some one to whom you have been a channel of untold blessing The very air of England around you, would say the same, if it could be made vocal I keep on thinking, 'If I had been different, perhaps Newman would have been guided to see things differently, and we might have been spared so many broken hearts and bewildered spirits' My dearest Newman, you have been a kind and helpful friend to me in a way in which scarce any one could have been ... I must cling to the belief that we are not really parted⁸

Ambrose St John, 1846

I do hope and trust that when Newman has become more familiar with the [Italian] language, he will have the opportunity of laying open to him [Pope Pius IX] the wants of England etc.: from the Pope's encyclical letter it quite looks as if he thought the most pressing want of the Church at present is something to meet the philosophy of the age

How is the Pope to know ... the influence Newman has on the minds of others, how that he is almost alone as a preacher to students and divines of an English turn of mind? Newman as you well know is not the person to solve [these difficulties] by putting himself forward.⁹

Edward White Benson, 1848

But oh, Lightfoot, never you turn Romanist if you are to have a face like that—it was awful—the terrible lines deeply ploughed all over his face, and the craft that sat upon his retreating forehead and sunken eyes Then if you had seen how his eye glistened and his whole face glowed, as he turned round to the Altar, lifting his Priest's cap, and bowing low, while he pronounced His name, and with such a voice—you could not but have felt your heart yearn towards him, and when you observed what a thrill ran through the congregation, you must have said,

⁸ Various extracts from letters to Newman quoted in Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 184, 230, 233, 244.

⁹ Lewis May, *Cardinal Newman*, 76. Newman's closest friend was with him in Rome in 1848 and wrote these words in a letter to J. D. Dalgairn.

‘Surely if there be a man whom God has raised up in this generation with more than common powers to glorify His Name, this man is he’—but how was it spoiled when he linked in ‘the Name of the Holy Mother of God’, when he joined together ‘Jesu! Maria!’ How painful was it to think that he had once been an English Churchman¹⁰

Lady Lothian, 1851

He was most kind. I was nervous, but without cause, for he is full of sympathy and Christian love that he is the last person one need to be afraid of. That which struck me most was his childlike sympathy and humility and next to that, the vivid clearness with which he gives an opinion. He is a very striking looking person. His saying of Mass is most striking. I do not know what makes the difference, but one is conscious of a difference. It appeared to me very unearthly.¹¹

Jane Todd, 1852?

My understanding has His truth in you, and never in any other human being. I know you are His Work, and His own Servant—as I feel the sun and the stars are His—and my mind rises to Him in praise and confidence—because He so condescends to show me signs and tokens of Eternal Life.¹²

Robert Ornsby, 1858

Your unsparing exertions—in the whole idea and scheme and each point of it worked out step by step, with nothing to blame yourself for—statutes—lectures—essay—sermons—the church and all its cost and troubles—with the provoking treatment you have sustained, and all this merely the visible points of a whole world of business and vexations; I can only wonder you have not broken down under it long before.¹³

¹⁰ Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 116–117. At the age of only eighteen this future Archbishop of Canterbury heard Newman preaching in London and wrote to J. B. Lightfoot, the future Bishop of Durham.

¹¹ Shortly after a visit to the Birmingham Oratory, this lady, a recent convert, wrote to her brother-in-law, Lord Henry Kerr. Quoted in Sugg, *Ever Yours Affly*, 114.

¹² A poor seamstress, who at a distance (she lived in Scarborough) had become a great admirer and sewed for Newman, making him drawers and waistcoats. Quoted in Sugg, *Ever Yours Affly*, 116.

¹³ The reference is to Newman’s work starting the Catholic University of Ireland; it comes in a letter from the professor of Greek and Latin literature, quoted by Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 459.



Newman c.1875, by Jane Fortescue Seymour

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1866

Dr Newman was most kind, I mean in the very best sense, for his manner is not that of solicitous kindness, but genial and almost, so to speak, unserious. And if I may say so, so sensible. He asked questions and made it clear for me how to act; I will tell you presently what that is: he made sure I was acting deliberately and wished to hear my arguments; when I had given them and said I could see no way out of them, he laughed and said, 'Nor can I'; and he told me I must come to the Church to accept and believe—as I hope to do. He thought there appeared no reason, if it had not been for matters at home, of course, why I should not be received at once, but in no way did he urge me on, rather the other way. More than once when I offered to go he was good enough to make me stay talking. Amongst other things, he said that he always answered those who thought the learned had no excuse in invincible ignorance, that, on the contrary, they had that excuse the most of all people. It is needless to say he spoke with interest and kindness and appreciation of all that the Tractarians reverence. This much pleased me, namely a bird's eye view of Oxford in his room.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, edited by Claude Collier Abbott (London: Oxford UP, 1935), 5–6. As a young undergraduate Hopkins wrote to Newman in August, while the

W. G. Ward, 1871

... the most attractive person I ever came across¹⁵

Henry Scott Holland, 1877

I recall the swift, sudden way in which I found him beside me as I was being led through the upper rooms by my friend. I turned at the sound of the soft quick speech, and there he was white, frail and wistful, for all the ruggedness of the actual features The talk was all about Oxford. He could not tire of the smallest detail of news from there. Every little touch was of interest to him.¹⁶

James Bryce, 1878

... the old man come again, after so many eventful years, to the hall where he had been wont to sit as a youth, the voice so often heard in St Mary's retaining, faint though it had grown, the sweet modulations Oxford knew so well, and the aged face worn deep with the lines of thought struggle and sorrow'.¹⁷

Punch, February 1879

A Cardinal's Hat! Fancy Newman in that,
For the crown o'er his grey temples spread!
'Tis the good and great head would honour the hat
Not the hat that would honour the head.

There's many a priest craves it: no wonder *he* waives it,
Or that we, the soiled head-cover scanning,
Exclaim with one breath, *sans* distinction of faith,
Would they wish Newman ranked with old Manning?¹⁸

latter was on holiday in Switzerland; Newman replied on 11 September, apologising for the delayed reply and arranging to meet Hopkins. This letter to Robert Bridges was written after the visit.

¹⁵ Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 666. A remark made by Ward in a letter to a convert friend, albeit declaring that he would have considered it a 'formal mortal sin' to have sided with Newman against the Pope and the bishops.

¹⁶ Lewis May, *Cardinal Newman*, 180. Henry Scott Holland, a canon of St Paul's Cathedral, London, paid Newman a visit at the Oratory.

¹⁷ Lord Bryce recalled the occasion when he proposed the toast for Newman in February 1878, as the latter paid a visit to his old college, Trinity in Oxford, and dined at high table. Newman replied 'reviving the memories of old college days'. Quoted in John Moody, *John Henry Newman* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1945), 293.

¹⁸ Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 410. At first it was rumoured that Newman had refused the honour of a cardinal's hat (apparently because he had requested that accepting the honour should not prevent him staying in Birmingham), hence these verses in *Punch*.

Italian ladies (at Newman's installation as a cardinal), May 1879

'Che bel vecchio! Che figura—pallido, sí, ma bellissimo!'¹⁹

Matthew Arnold (at a great reception in Norfolk House), May 1880

Newman was in costume, not full Cardinal's costume, but a sort of vest with gold about it and the red cap; he was in state at one end of the room with the Duke of Norfolk on one side of him and a chaplain on the other, and people filed before him, as before the Queen, dropping on their knees when they were presented and kissing his hand.²⁰

Sir Stephen Coleridge, 1882/1883

Cardinal Newman is now here [at Sir Stephen's own home] on a strictly private visit. He is weaker and a little more deaf than when he was last here but the magic halo is still about him. Today he said he would like to take my little boy Johnnie to the Zoological Gardens and together they went; and hand in hand wandered about there. Johnnie has no fear of him and prattles away to him, while the old man allows the boy to draw him on from cage to cage.²¹

Cardinal Manning, c.1887

He [Newman] has become the centre of those who hold low views about the Holy See, are anti-Roman, cold and silent, to say no more, about the Temporal Power, national, English, critical of Catholic devotions, and always on the lower side. I see no danger of a Cisalpine Club rising again, but I see much danger of English Catholicism, of which Newman is the highest type. It is the old Anglican patristic, literary, Oxford tone transplanted into the Church. It takes the line of deprecating exaggerations, foreign devotions, Ultramontanism, anti-national sympathies. In one word, it is worldly Catholicism, and it will have the worldly on its side, and will deceive many.²²

'From an observation you made', he said, 'I gather you are under the impression that Doctor Newman is a good Catholic'. I replied that

¹⁹ Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 414.

²⁰ Lewis May, *Cardinal Newman*, 195. Arnold refrained from kneeling, but 'made a deferential bow, and Newman took my hand in both of his and was charming' (Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 726).

²¹ Stephen Coleridge, *Memories* (New York: John Lane, 1913), 53.

²² Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 351.



Newman in 1881, by Sir John Everett Millais

such was my vague belief. He retorted: ‘Either you are ignorant of the Catholic doctrine or of the works of Doctor Newman’—he always said, ‘Doctor Newman’ in Oxford fashion and never gave him the title of Cardinal. After asking me which of Newman’s books I had read, he proceeded to tick off on his tapering fingers, in his usual way, ten distinct heresies to be found in the most widely read works of Dr Newman. This seemed to me, at the time, on a par with Voltaire’s discovery of a series of heresies in the Lord’s Prayer.²³

... only one thing had ruined that man’s career: Temper!—Temper!!—TEMPER!!!²⁴

William Ullathorne, 1887

As I was rising to leave, an action of his caused a scene I shall never forget He said in low and humble accents, ‘My dear Lord, will you do me a great favour?’—‘What is it?’ I asked. He glided down on his knees, bent down his venerable head, and said, ‘Give me your blessing’. What could I do with him before me in such a posture? I could not refuse, without giving him great embarrassment. So I laid my hand on his head and said, ‘My dear Lord Cardinal, notwithstanding all the laws to the contrary, I pray God to bless you, and that His Holy

²³ Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 415. Although Cardinal Manning had written a tribute in honour of Newman, recommending him to the Sacred College, this account coming from J. E. C. Bodley, a young friend of Manning, may show the latter’s private opinion.

²⁴ Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 420. Manning’s comment to Wilfrid Ward.

Spirit may be full in your heart'. As I walked to the door, refusing to put on his biretta as he went with me, he said: 'I have been indoors all my life, whilst you have battled for the Church in the world'. I felt annihilated in his presence: there is a Saint in that man!²⁵

Sir John Millais (quoted by a friend), 1889?

What a beautiful complexion you have, Mr Cardinal; I declare you've the complexion of a child!²⁶

Wilfrid Ward, April 1890

... a very sad sight, and he looked like a corpse

*The years of men are three score and ten, and after that it is labour and sorrow.*²⁷ He had four score of real vigour, but it is labour and sorrow now. Fr Neville let out that the Cardinal gets very depressed at being shut up in his room all day unable to do any thing Neville wants me to let him know of things which should be read to him. He evidently has a feeling of being dead practically, before he is really dead.²⁸

Dr Blunt and Mr Jenner Hogg (medical attendants), 1890

His Eminence Cardinal Newman was seized with inflammation of the right lung at 2 o'clock a.m. on Sunday, August 10. He very rapidly became worse until this evening at 8.45, when he expired. His Eminence expressed himself as feeling quite well an hour before this attack occurred.²⁹

A Sister of Mercy (Hunter's Road, Birmingham), 1890

Birmingham without the dear, precious old Cardinal! What a blank! Fiat!³⁰

²⁵ Bishop Ullathorne, about to retire as first Roman Catholic bishop of Birmingham, came to see Cardinal Newman in August 1887. Quoted in Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 744, referring to Cuthbert Butler, *The Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne, 1806–1889* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1926), volume 2, 283.

²⁶ 'The venerable Cardinal, then at the end of his long life, had climbed the marble stairs at Palace Gate not without difficulty, and saw the painter for the first time when he came to him, by the arrangement of common friends, as a sitter. [Sir John Millais] owned that he had astonished the Cardinal ... by announcing with a directness at once recognizable as proper to him [the remark quoted above].' (*The New York Times* [26 November 1899]).

²⁷ Psalm 90: 10.

²⁸ Gilley, *Newman and His Age*, 433. Quotations from a letter of Ward to his young wife in April 1890.

²⁹ Quoted in *The Times* obituary notice (12 August 1890).

³⁰ Sugg, *Ever Yours Affly*, 299.